



Town of Warren, Rhode Island

Minutes of the Economic Development Board

The Town of Warren, RI Economic Development Board met at a Regular Meeting on February 27, 2012 at 6:00 p.m. at Town Hall, located at 514 Main Street. The presiding officer was Brandt Heckert. Board members present were Karen Dionne, Darcy DaCosta, Patrick DeSocio, Kate Dickson, and Spencer Morris. Board members Sara Volino and Mark Lombardi were absent. Ex officio member Caroline Wells was absent. Kristin MacDonald was present at the meeting to serve as Secretary to the EDB.

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m.

1. Review and Approval of Minutes from the Regular Meeting of January 23, 2012

The minutes from the regular meeting held on January 23, 2012 were reviewed by the members via email. Mr. Morris made a motion to accept the minutes, the motion was seconded by Ms. Dionne, and all members were in favor.

2. Report and discussion on parking signage (Heckert)

Mr. Heckert reported on the current issues with parking signage. The new signs were installed on Railroad Avenue but since there is currently no specific ordinance that allows for time limits on Railroad Avenue the signs were taken down. The traffic commission, which consists of the Town Manager, the Police Chief, the Fire Chief, and the Warren DPW, need to review the issue before the ordinance can be revised. Mr. Heckert stated he believed that because the plan for the signs had been discussed and reviewed by Town Council in the past that the three hour time limits were set to go; however, the Traffic Commission will schedule a March meeting in order to review the issue and make a recommendation on changing the ordinance for the March Town Council meeting. Mr. Heckert plans to attend the meeting with the Traffic Commission. Mr. Heckert reviewed past parking studies done for the municipal parking spaces on Railroad Avenue and said that possibly a section of Railroad Avenue will remain open for parking without time limits.

3. Discussion and Action regarding correspondence to council (Heckert)

Mr. Heckert read a letter to Town Council regarding the EDB's report on business licensing; he mentions three items on the report that still require action. He stated that the letter is meant to be a follow-up to Town Council, and the purpose of the letter is only to remind Town Council to continue offering direction on these recommendations. Ms.

DaCosta was concerned that because the Town Council only reviewed the report in February that the submission of the letter was premature. Ms. Dionne recommended that in the sentence reading "...several that still require action" that the word "still" should be removed. A motion was made to submit the letter to Town Council with the word "still" removed from the text. There were six votes yea for submitting the letter to Town Council; Ms. DaCosta voted nay to submitting the letter.

4. Update and action on business outreach program (Dionne, Volino, Heckert)

The Business Outreach work group presented the board with a handout for the Downtown Warren Business Survey and Interview. The project will be ongoing and the goal will be to meet with as many business owners as possible over the following year. Ms. Dionne prepared postcards to be used as calling cards when visiting businesses; there is a blank space to be used to fill in individual contact information for each EDB member. The list of businesses is available in the EDB folder in Dropbox. Mr. Heckert stated the list is a suggested list and EDB's members can add businesses to the list as necessary.

5. Update on Discover Warren and Art Night (Dickson)

Ms. Dickson gave the Board an update on Bristol Warren Arts Night which will take place the last Thursday evening of each month. She briefly described the nature of the event, parking, funding for the event, and retail and restaurant participation. The initial Arts Night will take place on Thursday, March 29th. There will be a reception on March 15th at the Brass for artists and media involved in the event. Kate Dickson stated that the EDB has \$500 left in its 2011-2012. She mentioned the potential for a shared banner system for the town. Paula Silva is going to get quotes for brackets for the shared banner system; however, the Board discussed that there are uninstalled "Walk, Bike, Explore, Discover" banners and hardware that are still in the Town Planner's office. Mr. Heckert stated that there will be a need for coordination from the EDB on installing the current banners, and coordination between the EDB and Warren Arts and other groups if a shared banner project is undertaken. Ms. Dionne, emphasizing that she believes the hardware already purchased belongs with the "Discover" banners, said she would contact Ms. Wells about the plans for the uninstalled banners.

Ms. Dickson reported that Discover Warren is in the preliminary stages of establishing a sidewalk planter program. She also discussed plans to revive the kiosk at Railroad Avenue as an information booth, having a walking map available, spaces for posters, pamphlets, and possibly having the booth manned on weekends with volunteers from the Senior Center. Other Discover Warren news included interest in reviving Warren on Wheels and initiating a communal gift certificate program. A Warren Pride Campaign is also something Discover Warren would like to work on in the future.

6. Update on tax stabilization policy and business retention practices (Morris, Lombari)

Mr. Morris gave the Board a report on his meeting with Cathy Maisano regarding tangible property tax. He reviewed the tangibles tax issue with respect to the artist communities concerns. In general the tangible asset value of the property of Warren is about \$32 million dollars, with about half belonging to the major utility companies in town. The real tangible revenue from artists is around \$2200. All in all, tangibles makes up about 2.5% of the total assessed value in the town of Warren. The Board discussed the idea of an across the board \$1000 exemption in tangible property taxes which would be appealing to artists and small business owners. The Board discussed the balance between a tangible tax exemption and the future revenue that would come from attracting new businesses to Warren.

In his report on tax stabilization Mr. Morris discussed the property development ordinance that states that a business cannot come from another community, and if approved by Town Council, a tax credit would be issued on a sliding scale for new construction. The Board examined the subjective nature of the ordinance as to whether investment in renovation of a building that does not necessarily include the construction of new square footage still fits the purpose of the ordinance. Mr. Morris noted that this could possibly include renovation to mill complexes in town. The Board agreed the ordinance is not currently being utilized and could use reworking to fit with the town's current development needs. Mr. Morris briefly reported on tax stabilization programs in the neighboring communities of Bristol, Barrington and Portsmouth.

Mr. Morris also examined the Farm, Forest and Open Space tax exemption program. Currently 46 landowners take part in the program, but there is no incentive to go in to this program today. This program, which was founded about 30 years ago when property values were beginning to rise, fixes land value at a set rate. One of Mr. Morris's concerns about the program is that shows a fixed value but it doesn't give a comprehensive picture of our current land asset values.

The Board also briefly discussed the tax exemption program for senior citizens which is generous compared to similar programs in other communities. The Board also discussed the potential challenge of changing age demographics in our community.

7. Discussion of options for review and recommendations for revision of municipal policies and ordinances pertaining to key commercial properties in town

Due to the time, the discussion of this item was postponed until a later date.

A motion was made to adjourn, the motion was seconded, and all members were in favor.

The meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kristin M. MacDonald

Minutes submitted by Kristin MacDonald
March 17, 2012

